

Apprenticeship: An Instrument for Visual Arts Training, Culture and Traditional Knowledge Transfer Development in Nigeria

By

Georgebest U.C Onyeyela

Department of Industrial Design/ Fine and Applied Arts,

University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State

+2348036742652 Email: georgebest.onyeyela@unidel.edu.ng

Abstract

Apprenticeship as an instrument for visual arts training inherent in the African traditional society from before the Pre-colonial era is a veritable tool for propagating culture as well as knowledge development in Nigeria. It creates most themes upon which the identity of art of a people rests not to talk about economic proceeds from its activities. The example of Nok teracota, Benin Bronze, Igbouku art and Ife art works some of which products stolen during the colonial incursion eulogises their invaluableness. This preposition comes to bare, taking note of the need to promote apprenticeship as an alternative means of engagement of youth to dissuade them from seeking paid government employment that is usually limited. Therefore this paper discusses art as a means of communication tracing the development and historicity of apprenticeship from a global perspective. More so, it looks at Visual art as a language of expression with the perspective of calving in sculpture. Again, it beams light on the concept of cultural diversity and ethnicity in the face of this knowledge structure. Subsequently, this paper bemoans the challenges it is faced with militating against studio workshop practice having concluded that apprenticeship breeds creativity in craft and calving skills which is a media of expression in sculptural art rendition. Finally, some recommendations were put forward to halt the tide of degeneration in this knowledge structure of apprenticeship so as to encourage the growth of our culture to a height of envy and repute as well as improve on the economic fortunes of the Nigerian state.

Keywords: Apprenticeship, communication, Identity, Sustainable development, Global perspective, knowledge system

Introduction

Art is the highest form of human expression and a reflection of the society that creates it (Stanfield, 1984). Fine art has been expressed as the ability to create an object in its finest form. It involves a lot of activities therefore cannot easily be defined with a single definition especially because it revolves round different activities and focuses on the ability to create something. The individual's innate ability is reflective of his societal influence; hence his works show some tell tale signs of the environment (society) where he draws inspiration for his works. One important area to be noted in art teaching and learning is the area of Aesthetics and self-expression where there happens to be disparities of ideas (Avae, 2007). Fine art has been in existence many years ago to a point it is shared in the words of Shakespeare, that Art and Man are 'two brothers birthed on the same day'. This explains that Art is as old as man: many Art works produced today can be traced to the early man. The works are best described as Art in the pre-historic days. Fine art is involved with the spirit of creativity, in-borne or learned by students through a trained teacher who is a master in the skill. Why then is the culture of studio art practice gradually on the decrease among student/ artisans as have been observed. In schools, emphasis is laid on the students' self-expression in their work of art more than the aesthetics of art objects to ascertain the students' knowledge of the subject. Fine art involves the skill of creativity which needs to be studied by every student. The teacher on the other hand being an expert in the field possess a good mastery of the subject as well as have a good understanding of the subject methodology to bring about effective teaching and learning. Learning constitutes a change in believes, attitudes, values and aspirations. Learning is a direct product of skills impartation and it evaluates the masters' skill of craftsmanship. Whether working from studio to society or Society to studio, the exercise of studio practice must be seen to be engaged with zest in order to gain mastery. Hence, to be able to administer a knowledge driven assimilation in knowledge transfer, the medium of such tutelage could be formal or informal (Sagboje, 2012). Some or all of these and many more factors influence the study of art education in any educational institution and can reflect in the outcome of student's performance in the subject. Unfortunately, there are factors militating against this practice/ culture in schools' workshops.

Art as Means of Communication

Art is the use of imagination as a skill to create objects expressing ideas or feelings particularly in painting, drawing or sculpture especially when you study it (Hornby, 2010). Furthermore, Art is the highest form of human expression and a reflection of the society that creates it as it has the ability to create an object in its finest form (Stevenson, 2010). Art involves a whole lot of activities in such way that it is difficult to subject it to a single definition (Avae, 2007). Hence it suffices to specify it as sub-sectioned into Visual and non-visual/liberal art: while non-visual/Liberal art constitutes all forms of literary writings like poems, novels, short-fiction stories among others. Visual Art depicts all forms of expressions of images and forms creatively made from drawing, painting, and sculpture (metals, modelling and carving).

Within the Visual art is fine art and applied art. Fine art is seen as a subset of Art in a literary view of the divisions of study. Fine art could be seen as any type of art that is used for decoration purposes only. Works of fine art are not intended to serve utility purposes in the environment. They are beautification motivated, which serve basically as aesthetic models for example most drawings, paintings and some sculptural work. A piece of work is said to however be applied art when it serves intended utility purpose. Egonwa, (2011) implies that it is giving a piece of work in art, functional ability to interact with the environment and users. This differentiates Fine art from applied arts although both terms are many times used interchangeably. A combination of both would mean producing a piece of art which has aesthetic and utility value.

In another vane, Art has been viewed as a universal language not spoken although in visual perception. Thus art is a means of non-verbal communication that assesses texture and stimulation of images and forms. It organizes its compositions like other languages of English, French, Latin Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, Ika, etc which have alphabets. Fine art in place of alphabets have forms, colour, texture, shape, line and dot organized under the principles and elements of design to create pattern and display the ineffability of objects bringing about admiration of intended viewers. It is a language with its peculiar elements like other subject areas which have their own vocabulary pattern sent in message displayed in the piece of work of an artist. This skill of creativity evident in any piece of work is transmitted only through the means

of knowledge impartation system otherwise referred to as education and can be either formal or informal.

Ughamadu (2006) sees education as the process by which young people acquire the cultural heritage, knowledge, ideals and the civilisation of the past so as to be able to take part in the civilisation of the present and help build the civilisation of the future. This suggests therefore that education in art, through academic training / workshop training whether formal or informal, is a major means of acquisition of skills, knowledge and capability which is intended to cause a positive individual and societal transformation. Oniyama & Oniyama, (2005) further explains that such change in human disposition is orderly and progressive due to practical experience rather than growth and development of temporary body state. It then is important to state that apart from the formal training which occurs in academic institutions, informal training seems to have been quite popular and effective as well as predates the formal academic training. Hence a look at this prevalence in statistics will be a guide.

Historicity of Apprenticeship

The Cultural values which give significant identity to art of Africa are different from those which informed European arts (Egonwa, 2005). Apprenticeship dates far back to pre-colonial era. In Africa, each society had her specialized arts and crafts of which some products of this era are still relevant today. For instance, the famous Oyo carving, the Benin bronze smelting, the Nok sculpture among others are good examples of works of art of our traditional societies (Pelemo, 2007). According to Fafunwa, (2004), "the various skills taught as part of the education of the Nigerian child, include weaving, sculpting, black smiting, carving, farming, fishing, cattle-rearing, hair-plaiting, dress-making, bead making, catering, dyeing among others" Each child is apprenticed to a master craftsman. In fact, some skills are found to be peculiar to certain families and are, therefore, passed on from generation to generation. Such include traditional medicine (orthopedics, surgery as seen in circumcision and blacksmithing. (Pelemo, 2007).

- In the Western world, apprenticeship dates back to the Middle age where a master craftsman was entitled to employ young people as inexpensive labour. Most apprentices were male but female apprentices were found in crafts such

as seamstress, tailor, baker and stationer. Apprentices then usually began at about ten to fifteen years of age and would live within the master craftsman's household. Most apprentices aspire to become master craftsmen themselves upon completion of their agreement. (Wikipedia, 2017).

- The United Kingdom has a long trace of apprenticeship tradition dating back to around the 12th century which flourished up to 14th Century (Wikipedia, 2017). Even now, there currently exists Art foundry with numerous apprentices learning how life-size bronze sculptures are cast. Worthy of note is the fact that these foundries and studios exist for mostly informal training/apprenticeship and they get large patronage from artist as well as Art institutions. In France, the practice of apprenticeship was developed between ninth and thirteenth centuries with guides structured around apprentices, journeymen and master craftsmen. In Turkey, apprenticeship dates back to 11th century.
- From the foregoing, it is clear that the practice of apprenticeship has been a global phenomenon. It served as ladder to the present day technology and technological transformation globally. Most countries of Europe and beyond took keen interest in development of apprenticeship scheme early enough, hence their rapid industrialization and technological advancement. Most of the governments came up with policies and regulations on the operation of the scheme. Unfortunately, Nigeria's successive governments have failed to tow this line, hence our stunted socio-economic growth leading to monstrous alarming unemployment rise. Let us take a cursory look at the approach of apprenticeship schemes in selected countries of Europe and beyond.
- In Australia: Apprenticeships cover virtually all industrial sectors. They combine working hours and formal education and can either be part time or full time school for the training. The supervisory organization for this apprenticeship is Group Training Organizations (GTO), which undertakes visits and supervision of the programme. In Nigeria, this is likened to the Industrial Training Fund (ITF)

- In Austria: apprenticeship exercise is organized in a dual education system. In fact, company-based apprenticeship training is complemented by compulsory attendance of a part-time vocational school for the apprentices.
- Czech Republic: The apprenticeship programme in this country looks very interesting. Actually, apprentices spend about 30-60% of their time in companies and the rest in formal education. They may work for two or three days a week in the company and spend two or three days at a vocational school per week.
- Germany: Germany practices dual system education which made it possible to learn, work and attend school at the same time. In fact, it is almost impossible to obtain an employment without completing apprenticeship training. In 2004, the government signed a pledge with industrial unions that all companies, except the small ones must accept apprentices. All school leavers up to 15 years are made to start apprenticeship in their chosen professions until about 19 years old. They spend 50-70% of their time in companies, and 30% in formal education.
- In Pakistan: Apprenticeship Training by law is regulated both in industries and TEVT for theoretical instructions. It is mandatory for companies with up to 50 workers to take apprentices at its own cost. Recently, government in its reforms, have brought apprenticeship into National Vocational Qualification framework certification after assessment is done jointly by Chamber of commerce, Industry, as well as the government through its Apprenticeship Management Committee.
- Switzerland: Here, Apprenticeships are based on dual education system, just as we have in Austria and Germany.
- United States: New policy on apprenticeship, allow apprentices to work between 32-40 hours per week on a trade under a joint partnership agreement, and spend additional 8 hours every other week in classroom academic training.

It suffices to state that the visual art is a skilled profession which has no bias for the statement whether “artists are made or born” since a reasonable level of training is necessary in any case. Thus, to acquire such high level of training, education in art is necessary as it equips any individual to be self sufficient and enterprising; it also broadens his horizon and makes him a useful tool for innovation and national development. Thus for the avoidance of doubt, training in studio practice involve grooming students/artisans, craftsmen and highly skilled technicians and technologists in the profession.

Visual Art as a Language of Expression

Seeing visual art as a language of expression, the researcher groups the various units of Fine and Applied Arts: Textile, Graphics, Photography, Ceramics, Painting and Sculpture as dialects in Visual arts. Thus, taking Sculpture as the dialect under review, the term Carving becomes germane as one term of discuss since it is one critical creative medium of approach in sculptural exercise and a means by which indigenous cultural identities are defined. Carving in its exact or historical sense, can be placed side by side with the word Sculpture as both terms would appear synonymous with cutting. Hence Sadler, (1998) posits that the true sculptor’s craft is centred on cutting.

According to Hornby 2010, Carving suggests to cut a solid material in other to form something. It means to form something from a solid material the art of cutting to carve a statue out of stone, to carve a piece of pine. Carving is the act of using tool to cut in or shape a pattern into a material in a systematic way of scraping away certain portions of that material. In creating sculpture, carving techniques can only be applied onto any material with solid mass enough to behold a form after portions of its mass have been chopped away. Notably, craft techniques from a strictly technical point of view observes carving in wood as more difficult than working in stone and marble since wood only allows a one way approach of subtraction. However, in whatever material is used, the essential features of direct carving are the same. This is because the sculptor starts with a solid mass of material and reduces it systematically into a desired manner which suits his aesthetics of form and functionality.

Essentially, materials for carving are generally categorized into two groups namely: natural materials and synthetic materials (Uzoagba, 2000).

- Natural materials: as the name implies are mass of materials which exist or occur on their own for example plant, stone, vegetables among others.

- Synthetic materials: these are materials which are derived from man-made resources designed from factories. They usually possess textures suitable to be carved upon. Examples are soap, foam, block, and candle among others.

Carving is a form of handicraft and an art of sculpting handed down through generations since ancient times to the recent years. While Sculpture is a branch of fine arts that is concerned with producing figure in the round or in relief, or fashioning into some plastic materials or making mould for casting in metal, carving is an art that involves a subtractive process of modelling.

The first discoveries of carved works and engravings were cited when Stone Age man was exploring the darkest recesses of his winter caves (Omuaru, 2002). Studio practice (workshop apprenticeship) in African art continue to influence western Art even from pre and post colonial era despite its strict mode of training (Folorunso, 2004). Artists in Nigeria have been known for crafting works of art with enormous aesthetic value, diversity and vigour, coming from studio exercise. The example of some works which emanated from such practice include but not limited to the Ife sculpture, Nok terra cotta, Benin bronze caste, not to mention those creative works carted away during the colonial era by the British as well as works emanating from artists like Chris Ofili, Aino Onagbolu, and Bruce Onobrakpeya among others. These works constitute great assets to Nigeria's cultural and socio economic value and have in no small way cut a niche for Nigeria among great cultures of the world.

The Concept of Cultural Diversity and Ethnicity in The Face of this Knowledge Structure

While looking at the concept of cultural diversity, it is instructive to note that Culture is a term which explains the awareness or knowledge which shapes our behaviour and way of being. According to Newman, (1974), it essentially refers to the shared language, beliefs, values, norms, behaviour as well as the material objects which are passed on from one generation to the next. The idea of ethnicity has to do with that knowledge and approach which is identifiable to a particular group of individuals in a locality (Itedjere, 2006). Knowledge, they often say, is power. Knowledge is information, understanding and skills gained through education or experience (Hornby, 2000). The knowledge/ skills which citizens of a country acquire go a long

way to determine their level of patriotism and contribution to national integration and development. Knowledge is bedrock of any nation needed to effectively harvest her abundant human and material resources to be able to meet with the set sustainable development goals as well as be numbered among the developed economies of the world.

In the Nigerian context of necessity, functional education provides the pathway towards attaining knowledge. The importance of knowledge in education cannot be over-stressed as it is man's means of survival and identity in a rapidly dynamic environment. The need for the positioning of our knowledge system whether formal (academic training) or informal (apprenticeship/ workshop training) can only be indicative of our desire to develop our knowledge system through a vigorous studio /workshop practice, if it intends to attain a pride of place in cultural and ethnic identity.

Regrettably, lack of adequate funding for studio practice in art whether for academic training or workshop training forms the basic cog in the wheel of art development and it is reflective in the inadequate equipment in various schools studio workshops as well as training workshops / artisanship studio workshops which toil to no avail in quest to get grants for this purpose. The availability of PPE (personal protective equipment) is nothing to talk about as it is considered a luxury rather than safety orientation in the face of poor funding. All these affect the output of art in no small measure and make it difficult for diversification into art production to break forth into a major economic venture. Conclusively, the lack of or low patronage of Nigerian brand even by Nigerians mostly of government officials in the face of global competition is also a disincentive for the creative artist.

Conclusion

The utmost desire of every citizen of Nigeria in the prevailing circumstance tends towards putting food on the table and then leaves other things to fall in place. This desire, fear and experience has led most advanced countries years ago to resort to promoting apprenticeship as path way out of today's crossroad. Several countries like Germany, Japan, Britain, Switzerland, Pakistan, among others adopted apprenticeship schemes especially for vocational and technical education, making their youths and teenagers from 14 years and above to undergo the scheme for about

between 2-7 years depending on the particular trade. In this similitude, it is also evidently clear that our knowledge system from the traditional pre-colonial time is not an exception. Notably, because apprenticeship practices existed and has even improved over time but for the increasing difficulty to do business being experienced in the country ranging from poor funding to insecurity this day would have enabled every one apprenticed artist to establish own trade or business seamlessly.

Recommendations

- Deliberate solutions are required to stem the current trend of depreciation of our knowledge structure thereby promoting our cultural diversity for economic gains and thereon reverse the rising unemployment rate among graduates and school leavers in the country in the bid to forestall this calamitous situation. The articulation of the National Policy of Education (1981) and revised in 2004 placed premium on VTE as lead-way towards creation of employment through self-employment by graduates who undergo the programme and fashions the pathway for the realization of sustainable educational goals as well as the development of our cultural identity. Unfortunately, this objective is far from being achieved arising from poor implementation of the policy.
- It is now imperative to draw attention of government to the realization of the fact that funding of our academic/ training studio workshops is an easy way of creating incentive to the teaming self motivated artist who relies on the available knowledge system to actualise their potential.
- Government needs to sincerely invest more in education especially in provision of funds to equip academic /training studio workshops as well as encourage studio artisans with grants that helps them set-up their businesses. This will enable them to make their quota of contribution towards national development to the end that the creative industry becomes capable of being the future economic main-stay of the country.
- Finally, the researcher also admonishes patronage of made in Nigerian products of art in furtherance of this agenda as this will encourage the age long practice of skills for survival, attainment of self employment and reliability as well as sustain and preserve this apprenticeship system for posterity.

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